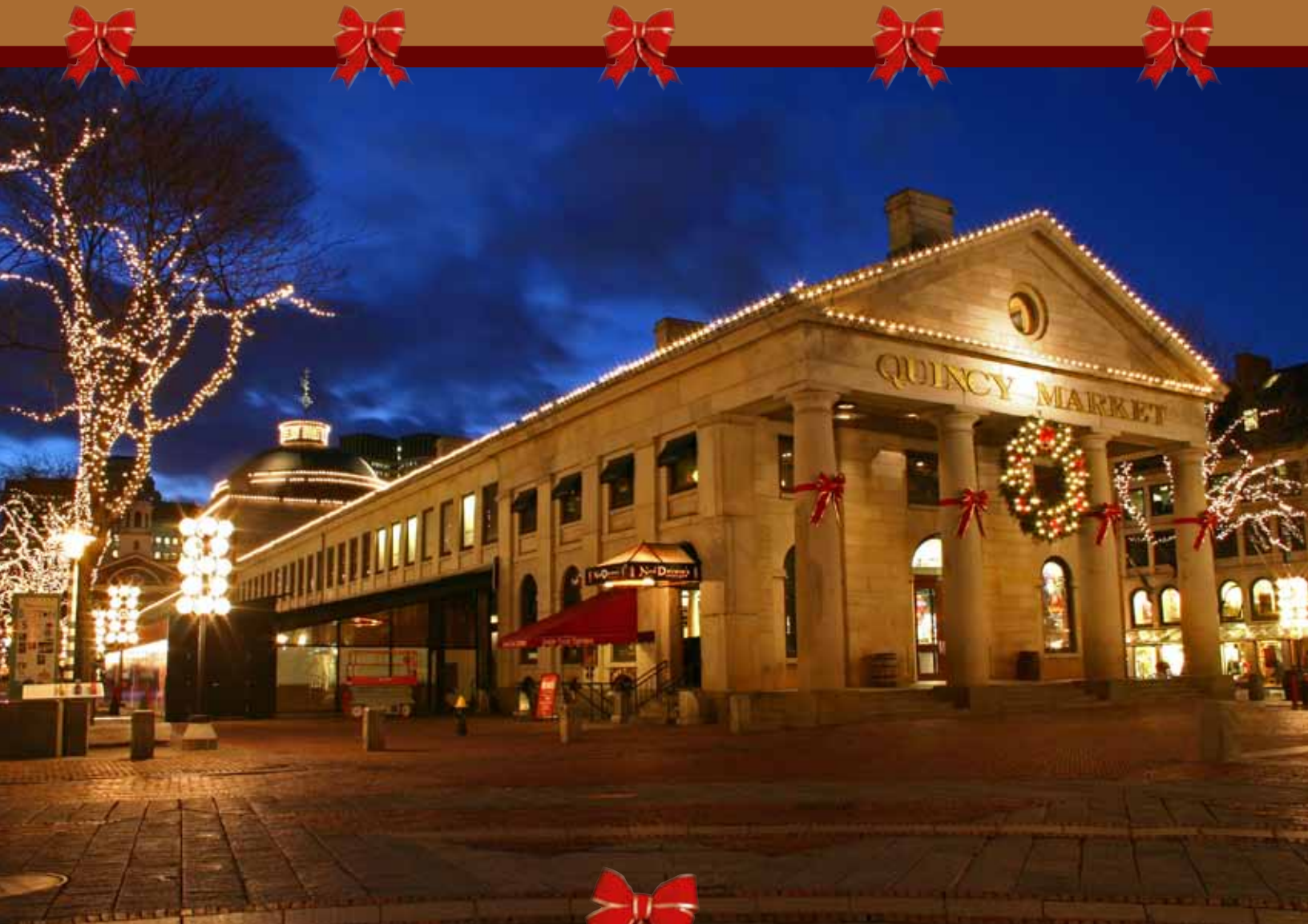


# NEW ENGLAND PASTOR

*"One interest will prevail . . . Christ our righteousness."*

November/December 2011



## SMALL STEPS AND GIANT LEAPS

*PISTIS CHRISTOU IN PAUL*

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*New England Pastor* is a bi-monthly magazine for pastors in New England, carrying forth the vision that Ellen White had for the area over a century ago: "I saw that when the message shall increase greatly in power, then the providence of God will open and prepare the way in the East for much more to be accomplished than can be at the present time" (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 149, ). It is free of charge to those who pastor in New England. For all those living outside of New England who would like to subscribe, please call or email us.



## Lessons from Today (Concluded) by Bill Brace

The article  
by Elder  
Ted Wilson,  
President of the  
Seventh-day Adventist

Church, caused my heart to skip a beat and to inwardly utter an “Amen!” Why? Well, it was the first time I had seen in print such terminology by any sitting leader of our beloved denomination—ever! The referenced column was entitled, “Corporate Identity and God’s Blessing.”<sup>1</sup>

Here are just a few lines from his fascinating call to clergy and laity alike: “*God deals with His church today as a corporate body.* If we are to receive the latter rain power of the Holy Spirit today, the body and the leadership must be on the same page. God has been ready for years to give His people the latter rain. He has been waiting for us to get ourselves together. If we would press together in seeking the promised power, pray for each other and stand united, shoulder to shoulder, the power would be given, the work would be finished quickly and we would enter the kingdom soon” (emphasis supplied).

Such words are sobering and food-for-thought, especially for us who are the under-shepherds to God’s flock.

As I mentioned in my earlier article,<sup>2</sup> the Scriptures are permeated with the corporate motif. Somehow or other, most of my education and my early years of ministry were devoid of this biblical concept. It was as if it didn’t exist. However, not only were the people of God in Old Testament times well acquainted with it, even teetted upon it, so also were the contemporaries of Jesus and the proponents of the early Christian Church. The apostle Paul, for example, wrote of it in 1 Corinthians 12.

So, is it time for God’s remnant to discover and embrace this vital truth? I do believe so. Why? Because within it is the panacea, or almost the whole panacea, which rectifies our lukewarmness, our self-

righteousness, our judgmental and critical attitudes, our skyrocketing divorce rate and the growing trend of disinterested youth and young adults who walk away from our ranks . . . to name just a few of our growing problems.

We have no greater example than Jesus to see how it is experienced in a practical sense. Scripture implicitly testifies that His very first work was a manifestation of this principle. It came at the time of His baptism (see Matthew 3:1-2; Mark 1:14,15; Acts 19:1-4; 5:31). Ellen White, ever the inspired prophetess and theologian, adds to this picture of our Savior by stating in a number of places that before Jesus was baptized He repented, not for His own sins, of course, but for the sins of the whole world. Thus, for example, she writes, “Christ came not confessing His own sins; but guilt was imputed to Him as the sinner’s substitute. He came not to repent on His own account; but in behalf of the sinner.”<sup>3</sup> Yes, Jesus so identified with us in His human nature that He actually repented for us!

Some have come to understand this as a corporate repentance. Could it be that in the final stages of history God is calling His bride to enter into the same great humbling and enriching experience?

Before you dismiss this out of hand, reader, I would ask you to give it some thoughtful and prayerful consideration. I do believe such an experience will open the floodgates and make possible the fulfillment of Revelation 18:1.

When things go awry in our beloved Church, whom do we blame? And why the delay in the Lord’s return? Leadership? Laity? Educators? The person in the back pew? All the aforementioned are easy targets, aren’t they? However, isn’t it time that we were honest with the Lord and with ourselves? Can we not bring ourselves to utilize the personal pronoun “We,” from the greatest to the least among us, realizing we are all the problem?

This concept has implications that are more far-reaching than the limitations the

present column allows. But briefly: Daniel, Nehemiah, and the latter’s contemporaries understood the healing ramifications of this gospel-laced truth as it related not only to themselves but to their forbearers as well. For example, Nehemiah records: “Then those of Israelite lineage separated themselves from all foreigners; and they stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers” (Nehemiah 9:2, NKJV).

Is it possible that Seventh-day Adventism needs to look within and to its history and see if there is a need for corporate repentance? A repentance that will be a repentance of the ages! Personally, I am astounded that so many among us see this principle as a negative. It really is a positive—a profound one, I believe, that will unleash the power of the Holy Spirit as never before and hasten the coming of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!

*Bill Brace has been involved in urban ministry for over twenty-five years. He pastors Seventh-day Adventist congregations in Braintree and Norwood, Massachusetts. In addition, he maintains an active radio ministry. His program “Portraits of God” is currently heard on several stations around the United States. He and his wife, Melanie, live in Norfolk, Massachusetts, and they have three grown children, one son-in-law, a daughter-in-law, and five beautiful grandchildren.*

- 1 Adventist News Network, August 8, 2011. Available at <http://news.adventist.org/2011/08/-luke-tells-us-twice.html>.
- 2 “Lessons from Today,” *New England Pastor*, Sept/Oct 2011: 13.
- 3 Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, January 21, 1873. See also *General Conference Bulletin*, April 4, 1901, par. 15 and *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7a (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing, 1970), 960.



# Small Steps and Giant Leaps: *Pistis Christou* in Paul

By Sigve K. Tonstad



“That’s one small step for man, a giant leap for mankind,” Neil Armstrong said to

a watching world when he set foot on the moon on July 20, 1969. He had meant to say “one small step for *a* man, a giant leap for mankind.” In the excitement of the moment, he left out the article before “man.” Fortunately, most people understood what he meant, and he was careful to explain it afterwards. The small step taken by a single individual as he stepped onto the surface of the moon was indeed a giant leap for mankind.

In this article I will link a small step in translation to a giant leap in interpretation. Perhaps I should say *two* small steps. Should the expression *pistis Iesou Christou* in the letters of Paul be translated “faith in Jesus Christ,” or should it be translated “the faithfulness of Jesus Christ”? The first small step in translation makes Jesus Christ the subject rather than the object of *pistis*. The second step takes *pistis* to mean *faithfulness* rather than *faith*. These questions are not matters at the periphery; they touch on key texts in Paul’s letters and a cornerstone of Protestant theology (Rom 1:17; 3:21-26; Gal 2:16, 20; 3:22; Phil 3:9). If we take these steps, they will turn into a giant leap with respect to how we understand the faith language in Paul, the content of the gospel, and the meaning of righteousness by faith.<sup>1</sup>

Let us begin by lining up alternative readings of three well known passages in Romans and Galatians (see chart above).

There can be no doubt that the biblical passages in question hold pride of place in Protestant theology. Before dealing with specific points of translation, it is necessary to explore how these alternatives are structured.

## Story or Doctrine

First, the traditional view structures *pistis Christou* as a *doctrine*, while the “new”

## Traditional translation

For in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, “The one who is righteous will live by faith” (1:17, NRS).

But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe (Rom 3:21-22, NRS).

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law (Gal 2:15-16, NRS).

translation locates this expression in a *story*. This point cannot be stressed too strongly. It is not by accident that the most successful launch of *pistis Christou* as *the faithfulness*

***Readers who fail to look for the underlying story can easily be misled—and have been misled—into seeing Paul as an ambassador of doctrine.***

of Christ rides on the back of an attempt to retrieve the underlying story in Paul’s letters.

<sup>2</sup> With the exception of Romans, Paul was writing to churches of which he was the founder. But even when he wrote to believers in Rome, he assumes that the story they have

## Alternative (“new”) translation

For the righteousness of God is revealed in it [the gospel] from faithfulness for faithfulness as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by [my] faithfulness’ (Rom 1:17).

But now apart from law the righteousness of God has been disclosed, witnessed by the law and by the prophets, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ to all who trust in him (Rom 3:21-22).

We, who are Jews by birth and not “Gentile sinners,” knowing that a man is not set right by works of the law but through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, we, too, put our trust in Christ Jesus in order that we might be set right by the faithfulness of Christ, and not by works of the law (2:15–16).

heard resembles the one he has been telling in his ministry. In the letters, Paul harnesses the story told on previous occasions by hints and allusions, but he does not retell it from the ground up.<sup>3</sup> Readers who fail to look for the underlying story can easily be misled—and have been misled—into seeing Paul as an ambassador of doctrine.

Martin Luther made *doctrine* the priority of interpretation, and he also constituted the Bible primarily as *doctrine*. To Luther, the Bible is either law or gospel. In his *Lectures on Galatians* he says that “whoever knows well how to distinguish the Gospel from the Law should give thanks to God and know that he is a real theologian.”<sup>4</sup> Gospel and Law are to him “like the light and the day, and the other like the darkness and the night.”<sup>5</sup> “If we could only put an even greater distance between them!” Luther exclaims.<sup>6</sup> While the “new” reading, often called the “subjective genitive” reading, will not deny that Paul may think in terms of doctrine, he

is primarily telling and interpreting a story. *Pistis Christou*, understood as *the faithfulness of Christ* is, in fact, a shorthand recapitulation of the whole story.

### Apocalyptic

Another key element in the “new” translation is the recognition that Paul’s experience and thought are permeated by apocalyptic. This insight, too, is a relative novelty in our understanding of Paul. “Apocalyptic” will to most of us be an adjective in search of a noun that it can qualify, but scholars use “apocalyptic” as a noun. Fifty years ago, Ernst Käsemann raised many eyebrows when he announced that “apocalyptic was the mother of Christian theology.”<sup>7</sup> Among other things, Käsemann said that apocalyptic made historical thinking possible. This should not come as a surprise to Seventh-day Adventist readers. Daniel, the only full-fledged apocalyptic book of the Old Testament, is a book that takes a comprehensive view of history.

But apocalyptic is more than a view of history. It has been said that the prophets expected the kingdom of God to rise out of history. The apocalyptic visionary, persuaded that the prophets had been too optimistic, argued instead that the kingdom of God would break into history. Something novel and unprecedented would suddenly appear. The old order would be upended. In Daniel, Michael would “stand up” (Dan 12:1). Moreover, the apocalyptic world view thought in terms of a cosmic conflict; it was strongly theocentric;<sup>8</sup> it had a universal scope; and it saw the good news in terms of deliverance and vindication.<sup>9</sup> A case in point is the fact that the most explicit and emphatic affirmation of the resurrection in the Old Testament is found in Daniel (Dan 12:1-2).

An “apocalyptic” Paul actually moves the great apostle closer to John in Revelation, widely acknowledged to be the most apocalyptic book in the New Testament. In Galatians, for instance, Paul gives an autobiographical sketch that begins almost like Revelation.

“For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin and is not what human beings would normally consider good

news. For I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it *through a revelation of Jesus Christ*” (*dia apokalypseōs Iesou Christou*; Gal 1:11-12, translation mine).

There it is, “a revelation of Jesus Christ,” not to John but to Paul! This revelation, in turn, speaks to the matter of content as well as to the way Paul received it

“Revelation” is a correct translation of *apokalupsis*, but the word is too weak, too ho-hum. As to content, “revelation of Jesus Christ” in Galatians finds its most riveting focus in “Jesus Christ crucified” (Gal 3:1). For Paul, this focal image could become the subject of reverence and not of scorn only by an apocalyptic event in his own life, a veritable in-breaking. Whether on the level of content or on the level of means of persuasion, the notion of *apokalupsis* is barely conveyed by the word “revelation” because Paul refers to an action in motion and not to a still picture. Something happened in history (the cross), and something happened to change Paul’s view of that event, both items belonging to the category of *apokalupsis*.

In Galatians, Paul connects *apokalupsis* (revelation) and *pistis* (faith or faithfulness) in a way that, first of all, gives *pistis* the character of an event, and, second, makes *faithfulness* the best translation of *pistis*.

“Now before *pistis* came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until *pistis* would be revealed” (*apokalupthēnai*; Gal 3:23).

“But now that *pistis* has come” (Gal 3:25).

Here, the subject matter of *pistis* cannot be *faith*, as though referring to the act of believing. Something *came* (3:25); something was *revealed* (3:23). Seeking to pin down the force of Paul’s terms, J. Louis Martyn sees a movement and an event in the making:

Here we see that, in Paul’s mouth, the verb *apokalupthēnai*, “to be apocalypsed” means more than its literal equivalent, “to be unveiled”

[3:23]. It is not as though faith and Christ had been all along standing behind a curtain, the curtain then being at one point drawn aside, so as to make visible what had been hidden. To explicate the verb *apokalupthēnai*, Paul uses as a synonym the verb *erchomai* [3:25], “to come on the scene.” And the result is startling, for it shows that Paul’s apocalyptic theology—especially in Galatians—is focused on the motif of invasive movement from beyond.<sup>10</sup>

The notion that something is coming on the scene is why the subject matter of the revelation will not be limited to faith as such (Rom 1:17; 3:21, 22, 25; Gal 3:23, 25). Hans Dieter Betz, in a clean break with precedent in his Galatians commentary, notes that *pistis* in Galatians 3:23 and 3:25 “describes the occurrence of a historical phenomenon, not the act of believing of an individual.”<sup>11</sup>

### Paul and the Old Testament

The third element in the structure of *pistis Christou* addresses Paul’s use of the Old Testament. No one denies that Paul relied on the Old Testament, but how did he use it? Was he shopping for convenient proofs, cutting and pasting at will within the context of an established canon of rabbinic practice? This is how the usual Protestant reading has seen him.

William Sanday and Arthur Headlam wrote in their influential Romans commentary that “the Apostle does not intend to base any argument on the quotation from the O.T., but only selects the language as far as being familiar, suitable, and proverbial, in order to express what he wishes to say.”<sup>12</sup> The “new” view, by contrast, sees the original Old Testament voice respected and preserved in Paul’s argument. As Richard Hays argues in his book on Paul’s use of the Old Testament in Romans, “once the conversation begins, the addressees recede curiously into the background, and Paul finds himself engaged with an older and more compelling partner.”<sup>13</sup> That partner is the Old Testament. Paul, the junior partner in the dialogue, is a keen and respectful listener.

## Conclusion

Story, apocalyptic, and the Old Testament are key elements in the structure that takes *pistis Christou* to mean *the faithfulness of Christ*. These elements are either absent or weakly projected in the reading that sees *pistis Christou* as the *faith of Christ*. Even if the “new” reading fails to prevail on the traditional view, the latter is under pressure from the new emphases and has already appropriated some of them in defense of the old view.<sup>14</sup>

In the second part of this article, we will look more closely at the specific texts.

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in Europe. He has written books and many articles in Norwegian. His books in English are *The Scandals of the Bible* (2000). *Saving God's Reputation: The Theological Function of Pistis Iesou in the Cosmic Narratives of Revelation* (T. & T. Clark, 2006), and *The Lost Meaning of the Seventh Day* (Andrews University Press, 2009). He is married to Serena Hasso (Tonstad), also a physician and professor at Loma Linda, and they have two daughters, Linn Marie (Ph.D. in theology, Yale University) and Kristel (Master in Public Policy, Harvard University).

- 1 For an earlier review of the subject, see Sigve Tonstad, “*pi, stij Cristou*: Reading Paul in A New Paradigm,” *AUSS* 40 (2002), 37–59. Views *pro* and *con* are represented in *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle (Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson, 2009).
- 2 Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11* (SBLDS 56; Chico: Scholars Press, 1983; [repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002]), 33–117.
- 3 According to Hays (*Faith of Jesus Christ*, 197), the phrase “Jesus Christ publicly exhibited as crucified” (Gal 3:1) is an allusion that “stands for the whole story and distills its meaning.” In 2 Thessalonians, Paul refers to prior instruction, saying, “Do you not remember that I told you

these things when I was still with you?” (2 Thess 2:5). I have discussed this to some length in “The Restraint Removed: A Truly Alarming Thought (2 Thess 2:1–2),” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 29 (2007), 133–151.

- 4 Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1–4*, in *Luther's Works* 26, ed. and trans. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1999 [1963]), 115.
- 5 Luther, *Galatians*, 342.
- 6 Luther, *Galatians*, 342.
- 7 Ernst Käsemann, “Die Anfänge christlicher Theologie,” *ZTK* 57 (1960), reprinted as “The Beginnings of Christian Theology” in *New Testament Questions for Today*, trans. W. J. Montague (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 102.
- 8 Thus Beker (*Paul the Apostle*, 328.), “Paul is an apocalyptic theologian with a theocentric outlook.”
- 9 J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul's Apocalyptic Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 14–15.
- 10 J. Louis Martyn, “The Apocalyptic Gospel in Galatians,” *Int* 54 (2000), 254.
- 11 Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 176, n. 120.
- 12 William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902; reprinted 1992), 289.
- 13 Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 35.
- 14 The change is evident in Stephen Westerholm's retelling of the “Lutheran” Paul; cf. *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 22–41.

## Letters to the Editor

I appreciated the way Shawn Brace framed the current spiritual formation debate (“The Real Problem with Spiritual Formation,” Sept/Oct 2011), this little tempest in a tea pot. What we have missed so far is a wonderful teaching moment to consider how an intentional approach to spiritual growth, however that is defined, relates to the life of faith and what Jesus Christ has already done for our salvation. While he doesn't acknowledge it, I would suspect he would agree that there will always be a certain theological tension between the work of Christ and man's strategies to grow in

Christ. It seems to me that the role of previous experience, as illustrated by Rick Howard and even Martin Luther, is very important in establishing that level of comfort in participating in spiritual formation practices. When spiritual formation gets bogged down through a focus on self rather than the objective work of Christ, it ceases to be helpful in the Christian life. I find this more practical and helpful than pointing fingers at the occult or Ignatius of Loyola.

—Warren Ruf, New Haven, Connecticut

## Letters Policy

New England Pastor welcomes and encourages your letters, with the reminder that the inclusion of a letter in this section does not mean that the opinions and ideas necessarily reflect the views of the editors. Letters will be edited for space and clarity. Send correspondence to New England Pastor, 67 Cottage St., Bangor, ME 04401 or newenglandpastor@gmail.com.

# Forgiveness and Victory: Separate or Inseparable?

by Norman McNulty



Righteousness by faith is a crucial and profound doctrine for Seventh-day Adventists. Within our church, it

seems that some are more interested in forgiveness, while others focus more on victory over sin. The Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White obviously speak about both. As I have studied the concept of salvation, I have come to realize the vital necessity of both elements in my Christian experience. The emphasis of either forgiveness or victory that leads to a minimization of the other is actually out of harmony with Scripture.

For example, in Romans 4:7, 8, Paul says, “Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.”<sup>1</sup> Later, in Romans 6:1, 2, he writes, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?”

While some have tried to limit the doctrine of salvation to a few chapters in Romans that emphasize forgiveness (i.e., Romans 3-5), the verses quoted above from Romans 4 and 6 clearly paint a more comprehensive picture. Paul actually gives a complete theological explanation of salvation in Romans 1-8.

This is where I came to an important discovery in my faith experience. It has been my settled conviction for many years now about how important victory over sin is for Seventh-day Adventists. Christ has been in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary doing a work of cleansing since 1844. He is working to develop a cleansed, victorious people. When that work is finished, He will return. Hebrews 9:27, 28 expresses this idea very clearly: “And as it appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to

bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.”

Notice also these statements from Ellen White:

Now Christ is in the heavenly sanctuary. And what is He doing? Making atonement for us, cleansing the sanctuary from the sins of the people. Then we must enter by faith into the sanctuary with Him, we must commence the work in the sanctuary of our souls. We are to cleanse ourselves from defilement.<sup>2</sup>

***What struck me is that  
if I need faith to receive  
power to have victory  
over sin in my life today,  
I also need faith to  
believe that Christ really  
has forgiven me of all of  
my sins.***

From the Holy of Holies, there goes on the grand work of instruction. The angels of God are communicating to men. Christ officiates in the sanctuary. We do not follow Him into the sanctuary as we should. Christ and angels work in the hearts of the children of men. The church above united with the church below is warring the good warfare upon the earth. There must be a purifying of the soul here upon the earth, in harmony with Christ’s cleansing of the sanctuary in heaven.<sup>3</sup>

When the sanctuary is cleansed, our sins will be blotted out forever. However, Christ offers forgiveness and cleansing now. What struck me is that if I need faith to receive power to have victory over sin in my life today, I also need faith to believe that Christ really has forgiven me of all of my sins. If we don’t have complete faith to believe that the sins of our past have been forgiven, how can we have faith to believe that Christ can enable us to be victorious? And if we don’t really have faith that our sins have been forgiven, how will Christ be able to blot out our sins with His blood? In essence, a lack of faith in forgiveness shows that we don’t believe in the efficacy of His blood. Faith in the merits of Christ for forgiveness is also an essential part of Christ’s cleansing work in the heavenly sanctuary.

This emphasis on faith in the merits of Christ for the forgiveness of past sins, as well as faith in His enabling grace for victory, was a key part of the “most precious message” of 1888. Ellen White talks about the tremendous blessing received by those who heard these messages.

Notice the following statement:

My heart rejoiced as I heard people acknowledge that they were obtaining an education in faith which they had never had before, and that Jesus was precious to their souls. They said that they had never before known by an experimental knowledge what the love of God was, but now they had heard, they had believed, and they would go forth to preach as they never had before preached the merits of a crucified and risen Saviour. They felt that indeed they had had a new conversion. Their souls were free, their sins forgiven, the love of Jesus was in their hearts.<sup>4</sup>

Here we can see from this statement that Christ and His matchless charms and His love were so beautifully presented that the listeners were convinced that Jesus loved them so much that it would be His joy to pardon them. This corresponds with the thought of Psalm 86:5 where David writes, “For thou, Lord art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.” That concept is as true now as it always has been, and it is as much needed now as it was in 1888.

In addition, victory over sin was also very prominent in what Jones and Waggoner taught. Notice the unequivocal statement from Waggoner. “But before probation ends, there will be a people so complete in Him that in spite of their sinful flesh, they will live sinless lives. They will live sinless lives in mortal flesh, because He who has demonstrated that He has power over all flesh lives in them—lives a sinless life in sinful flesh.”<sup>5</sup>

This statement is fully in harmony with the Bible. For example, Jude 24 says, “Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His throne with exceeding joy . . .” Romans 8:3, 4 says, “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.”

Notice as well the following statements from Ellen White:

He who has not sufficient faith in Christ to believe that He can keep him from sinning, has not the faith that will give him an entrance into the kingdom of God.<sup>6</sup>

Everyone who believes on Christ, everyone who relies on the keeping power of a risen Saviour that has suffered the penalty pronounced upon the transgressor, everyone who resists temptation and in the midst of

evil copies the pattern given in the Christ life, will through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ become a partaker of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. Everyone who by faith obeys God’s commandments will reach the condition of sinlessness in which Adam lived before his transgression.<sup>7</sup>

***Many of us only want His forgiveness while we ignore the gift of victory that He offers. Others of us focus so much on victory that we lose sight of the matchless charms of love that He offers us, and the pursuit of victory becomes human-centered.***

It seems that the “most precious message” of 1888 taught complete reliance on Christ for forgiveness and victory. It is through this understanding and experience of righteousness by faith that we are transformed into the likeness of Christ’s character because we have faith that our sins really are forgiven, that Christ really is our righteousness, and we really become victorious Christians.

When a generation of Seventh-day Adventists has this experience, we will see the fulfillment of Revelation 18:1. However, just as Christ had been lost sight of by Seventh-day Adventists back in 1888, in many of the same ways He has been lost sight of today. Many of us only want His forgiveness while we ignore the

gift of victory that He offers. Others of us focus so much on victory that we lose sight of the matchless charms of love that He offers us, and the pursuit of victory becomes human-centered. Either way, the full picture of Christ is lost. Therefore, it is my prayer that each one of us will learn to trust fully in Christ’s merits for the complete forgiveness and victory that He longs to give each one of us.

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- 1 All Scripture is taken from the *King James Version*.
  - 2 Ellen G. White, *The Ellen G. White 1888 Materials* (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987), 127.
  - 3 *Ibid.*, 27.
  - 4 *Ibid.*, 287.
  - 5 Ellet J. Waggoner, *1901 General Conference Bulletin*, 146.
  - 6 White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1980), 360.
  - 7 *Idem.*, *In Heavenly Places* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1967), 146.





**M**y friend Jill lost her only son to a motorcycle accident. I have three sons. It

was sad taking the oldest to college, especially the heart-wrenching sibling good-byes, but, Lord-willing, I will not have to wait as long to see my first-born again as Jill will have to wait to see her first, and only, son. I don't know why God allowed this terrible tragedy, but I do know that He lost a son in a way, too. I do know that He understands the pain that Jill and her husband are feeling (see Isaiah 63:9).

I am fortunate to still have my mom, but in a way I have lost her, too, because she has Alzheimer's. The meds she takes to slow down the process of dementia have bad side effects, making her feel nauseated and weak in the knees for most of the first part of the day. She gets confused easily and doesn't remember what day it is. Meandering over to her big desk calendar that lies on the granite countertop of her posh Sarasota, Florida, condo, she wonders what it is she is supposed to be doing. I remind her over and over again why it is that she can't drive anymore, because she failed her road test that she had to take after some caring individual anonymously reported her as an unsafe driver. Over and over she tells me that she is a better driver than the people she rides with. But she doesn't ride with anyone—though she will now if she wants to go anywhere. (Talk about unsafe drivers. I got pulled over for going 26 miles per hour over the speed limit. As if that wasn't bad enough, I had two passengers with me, one in a wheelchair and the other severely disabled/different. I will contest it in traffic court to try to reduce some of the penalty, and if the officer doesn't show, they will throw the

whole thing out, and I suppose I will not get a fine or any points on my driver's license or increase in my insurance premiums.)

When I was in college, I used to feel guilty because my life was so easy (except for Physics, which I almost flunked). And compared to most people, I suppose I have had a very easy life. My parents used to tell me that from the one to whom much is given, much is expected (see Luke 12:48). That put a lot of pressure on me.

I also had the lovely experience of finding out toward the end of my college career that (I hope none of my siblings read this) in one way or another they had all disappointed my father and that he was holding out hope that maybe I would be the kid to rise to the top and become even more successful in my career than

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he was in his (he was the vice president of sales for a very large corporation, where he was employed for 39 years). I think the four grandchildren I gave him would have been an acceptable trade-off if he had been alive to meet them all (he did get to hold the oldest, two days before he died).

So, even though my life has been easier than most, I have some pain and sorrows, too. And if you take a look around you, you will find that everyone does. But there is One who has sorrow unlike any sorrow. I believe that He wants us to know that and to sympathize with Him. Perhaps Jeremiah gives us a

glimpse of this. In Lamentations 1:12 he says,

“[Is it] nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted [me] in the day of his fierce anger” (KJV).

The time is coming when God will pour out His Spirit, and if we will receive His Spirit, it will cause us to mourn for Him (see Zechariah 12:10). I suppose this notion will be resisted by many of us because of a preconceived idea that Christians should be “in-right, outright, upright, downright” happy all the time. But the Bible says that Jesus was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (see Isaiah 53:3). And we are told that “of all the gifts that Heaven can bestow upon men, fellowship with Christ in His sufferings is the most weighty trust and the highest honor.”<sup>1</sup>

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1 Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1940), 224.

# The Message of the Seven Sneezes

by Jay Edison



There is sudden sorrow in a home somewhere near the eastern border of Israel. A young Shunamite boy, probably an early teen, has just died unexpectedly. The cause of death may have been heat stroke, a ruptured aneurysm, or encephalitis. We are only told that he had sudden onset of severe headache while in the field with his father, was carried home, and died on his mother's lap.

This boy was special. His conception was a miracle, bestowed to an infertile mother as a gift of gratitude for kindness to the prophet Elisha. His mother could not fathom the tragedy of sudden death of her child of promise.

Her husband was not much help. He was not even concerned enough to come home with the sick boy. He was baffled by her request for a donkey to ride to the prophet. "Why will you go to him today? It is neither new moon nor Sabbath" (2 Kings 4:22).<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps he did not even know the boy had died. It is apparent that there was a communication gap in this marriage.

The mother took control. "Then she saddled a donkey and said to her servant, 'Drive and go forward; do not slow down the pace for me unless I tell you.' So she went and came to the man of God to Mount Carmel." Her plea to the prophet was made more poignant by her need for emotional support from outside the family. She insistently sought the prophet. "When she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught hold of his feet. And Gehazi came near to push her away: but the man of God said, 'Let her alone for her soul is troubled within her; and the Lord has hidden it from me and has not told me.' Then she said, 'Did I ask for a son from my Lord? Did I not say, 'Do not deceive me'?" (v. 27, 28)

Her only hope was for a resurrection. Elisha sent his assistant, a poor substitute. The mother clung to the prophet desperately. She would accept no surrogate, but only the prophet himself. "The mother of the lad pleaded, 'As the Lord lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you.' And he arose and followed her." (v. 30) She laid the boy on Elisha's bed, in the guest room built especially for Elisha, and sent for the prophet.

There was no self promotion in Elisha's approach. He did not call for witnesses, but went into the room alone. This was a private matter between him

## ***Eternal life is not merely living a long time.***

and the Lord. Often the Lord is able to accomplish more when the option for publicity is left to Him—a principle too often ignored by would be healers. After prayer, Elisha lay on the boy, making full body contact: "And he went up and laid on the child, and put his mouth on his mouth and his eyes on his eyes and his hands on his hands, and he stretched himself on him; and the child became warm" (2 Kings 4:33-34). When God gives life, every aspect of the person is affected. True healing is mental, social, and spiritual, not merely physical. A puzzling thing happened. The boy became warm, but remained comatose, not fully alive. Many persons are spiritually comatose, spiritual zombies. They have a warm experience but do not experience the full light of redemption and restoration. They are spiritually dead. No wonder many discerning people fail to see value in religion.

When Elisha prayed again, a startling thing happened. "Then he returned and

walked in the house once back and forth, and went up and stretched himself on him; and the lad sneezed seven times and the lad opened his eyes" (v. 35). Some might dismiss the seven sneezes as coincidence, but I don't think so. There is much involved when God heals, especially with resurrection, the ultimate healing. Healing is more than super CPR. When God gives life, every aspect of the person is affected. Our God is an all-or-nothing God. He is not interested in partial conversion, partial new birth, or partial resurrection. True healing is all inclusive: mental, social, and spiritual, not merely physical.

Sneezes are not in the same league with other sevens in scripture: churches, angels, trumpets, seals, plagues and thunders. Sneezes are more on a level with the puny light of candles. However, God is not limited to the grandiose. He who drew a spiritual lesson from a miniscule mustard seed can teach from sneezes.

Eternal life is not merely living a long time. Human tolerance of life falls far short of eternity. God is too lovingly considerate to promise eternal life without making it worth living so long. "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

I wish I knew the rest of the story of those few that we know for certain are living eternally: Enoch, Moses, and Elijah. I would love to ask them how eternal life is different from temporal life. We are told it is good beyond our wildest dreams! "... but just as it is written, 'Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him' " (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Without resurrection power we all are spiritually dead. "For this reason it says 'Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you' " (Ephesians 5: 14). Seven life practices of the person

gifted with eternal life follow in the next verses. I think of them as expressions of the Shunamite boy's sneezes. They make eternal life "abundant." Here they are:

**Sneeze Number One—The Gift of Wisdom:** "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise" (Ephesians 5: 15). The wisdom of the great controversy world view is essential to emotional and mental survival of believers in these troublous last days. "How blessed is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding. For its profit is better than the profit of silver, and its gain than fine gold. She is more precious than jewels; and nothing you desire compares with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her, and happy are all who hold her fast" (Proverbs 3:13-18).

**Sneeze Number Two—The Gift of Prioritized Living:** "Making the most of your time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:16). The first priority of the person gifted with Eternal Life is intimacy with God. "As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" (Psalm 42:1, 2).

**Sneeze Number Three—The Gift of Guidance:** "So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:17). God gives guidance as a gift, and with guidance, He gives strength and consistency in implementation of His will. "For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Colossians 1:9).

**Sneeze Number Four—The Gift of the Holy Spirit:** "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). Every false promise of addictions, dependencies, and obsessive behaviors is truly satisfied by infilling of the Holy Spirit. "In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness . . ."

(Romans 8:26).

**Sneeze Number Five—The Gift of Joyful Worship:** "Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19). The Sabbath is a wonderful opportunity for joyful worship. The Sabbath is linked with a loving life. "Then you will take delight in the Lord, And I will make you ride on the heights of the earth" (Isaiah 58:13, 14). The true joy of the Sabbath is in sharing with others. "Also the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord . . . everyone who keeps from profaning the Sabbath and holds fast My covenant; Even those I will bring to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer" (Isaiah 56:6,7).

**Sneeze Number Six—The Gift of Thankfulness:** "Always giving thanks for all things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father" (Ephesians 5:19). "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits" (Psalm 103:2). As Ellen White notes, "If we would give more expression to our faith, rejoice more in the blessings that we know we have, we should have more faith and greater joy. No tongue can express, no finite mind can conceive, the blessing that results from appreciating the goodness and love of God. Even on earth we may have joy as a wellspring, never failing, because fed by the streams that flow from the throne of God."<sup>2</sup>

**Sneeze Number Seven—The Gift of Subjection:** "And be subject to one another in the fear of Christ" (Ephesians 5:21). The rest of the book of Ephesians discusses ever-widening spheres of subjection, to include spouses, children, fellow believers, employer/employee relationships; even those who rule over us. All through scripture are references to God's special regard for those submissive to needs of the poor and the outcast. "One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his good deed" (Proverbs 19:17). The gift of subjection, being completely loving as Jesus is, is the fullest expression of abundant Eternal Life. "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more

important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:3-5).

"And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:11-13). If eternal life is merely a prolongation of life's struggles, most, if not all of us, would eventually search for the delete button. Human tolerance of life falls far short of eternity.

I knew a lady, a nursing home resident, for whom life had become an unrelenting misery. Bedridden, depressed, anorectic, prone to skin tears with the gentlest attempts at turning her in bed; she was in constant discomfort. On her one hundredth birthday, the staff propped her up with pillows, put a cake covered with a forest of candles in front of her, and took a photograph. The newspaper caption proclaimed that she celebrated her centenary birthday. She did not celebrate! Death was her fondest wish. But Jesus invites you to receive the gift of Eternal Life, including each of the qualities that make it "abundant." Please accept the gift.

*Jay Edison is a retired family physician who had a second career with ADRA (The Adventist Development and Relief Agency). Jay and his wife Yvonne (Vonnice) now live in Ossipee, New Hampshire.*

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1 All texts are from the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB).

2 Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1942), 252-253.

# The Experience of Justification by Faith

by Jerry Finneman



In an earlier article I presented the biblical and historical case for the legal phase of justification.<sup>1</sup> This

occurred in the death of Christ when He exhausted the penalty of condemnation that was hanging over the fallen race because of Adam's sin (Romans 5:9, 18). While forensic justification is a declaration of acquittal, there is also a second, an experiential, phase of justification. This phase occurs when one believes in Christ, personally, with heartfelt appreciation (Roman 10:10). The purpose of this article is to discuss this second phase of justification.

Several biblical descriptive phrases have a mutual relationship with justification by faith. While each set of phrases brings a specific viewpoint of its own to the table, each one deals with different aspects of the same personal faith union with Christ. These are by no means hollow and meaningless phrases. Some of these are: "righteousness by faith," "justified . . . by the Spirit," "born again," "Christ in you," "put on Christ," "that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith," "partakers of the divine nature," "partakers of the Holy Spirit"<sup>2</sup> and so forth. All of these are involved in a faith experience. When a person believes in Christ, justification—a making righteous—occurs in the mind.

Many Protestant scholars understand justification by faith to be a forensic, alien, and extrinsic only righteousness residing outside the believer. Accordingly, justification then refers "exclusively to a change in the status of a sinner."<sup>3</sup> This one-sided doctrine of justification originated with Melancthon and his brilliant student Martin Chemnitz—the main contributor to the Formula of Concord (1578, 1580) some 30 years after Luther died. With regard to justification, the Formula is at variance with Luther who taught justification by faith as an experience of Christ within the believer. In 1535 Luther wrote that Christ justifies by being present in faith:

[F]aith justifies because it takes hold of and possesses this treasure, the *present* Christ. . . . Where the confidence of the heart is present, therefore, *there Christ is present*, in that very cloud and faith. This is the formal righteousness *on account of which a man is justified*. . . . (emphasis supplied).<sup>4</sup>

Chemnitz later became a leading German theologian. He helped unify the Lutheran Church and was instrumental in pushing forward the doctrine of forensic justification. From the time of Chemnitz and the Formula of Concord, to this day, Lutheran scholarship tends to separate forensic justification from any experience within the believer. Other Protestants also tend to emphasize forensic only justification and to deny any personal transformational phase in justification. Consequently, there has been a devaluation of moral renewal. Dry objectivism tends to depersonalize and thus devitalize Christianity.

Alister McGrath observed that the concept of an external legal/forensic justification was not developed by Luther, but by his followers beginning with Melancthon "resulting in the doctrine now generally known as 'forensic justification.'"<sup>5</sup>

According to Melancthon, God pronounces the verdict that the sinner is righteous in the heavenly court (*in foro divino*). This legal approach to justification gave rise to the term "forensic justification" from the Latin word *forum* ("market place" or "courtyard") the place traditionally associated with the dispensing of justice in classical Rome.<sup>6</sup>

This change within Lutheranism has been documented also by Professor Tuomo Mannermaa and associates in their Finnish Luther research.

In contrast to Luther's theology, forgiveness (*favor*) justification and the real presence of God (*donum*) in faith are in danger of being separated by the one-sidedly forensic doctrine of justification adopted by the Formula

of Concord and by subsequent Lutheranism. In Luther's theology, however, both of these motifs are closely united in his understanding of the person of Christ. Christ is both the *favor* and the *donum*.<sup>7</sup>

There are two leading reasons for the emphasis of forensic justification in the Formula of Concord. One reason is because the Council of Trent insisted on an inherent justification within the believer that must be received through the Catholic Church, by its priests, as they administer the seven so-called sacraments of grace—baptism, penance, confirmation, Eucharist, holy orders, matrimony, and extreme unction.<sup>8</sup>

The second reason was because of differences among Lutherans who disagreed, concerning justification by faith, within their own ranks. The Formula of Concord was an attempt to heal the divisiveness within the Lutheran movement following Luther's death. Concord's insistence on forensic justification was because of the Osiander faction among Lutherans. Luther's teaching of justification by faith was lost sight of in the "Lutheran tradition because of an over-reaction to Osiandrianism. Melancthon's forensic view of justification prevailed over Osiander's view of the essential indwelling of the righteousness of Christ in the believer."<sup>9</sup> Osiander's teaching was condemned in Article III of the Formula.

Clearly, the Formula of Concord did not follow Luther in justification by faith. Luther taught that Christ is present in grace, in God's Word, and in faith. Faith unites the believer with the person of Christ who is God's righteousness and, consequently, the believer's justification. Luther did not separate, nor distinguish, Christ from His work of justification. His was a Christological approach. He taught that justification is embodied in the Person of Christ. Because faith unites the believer to Christ, He is personally present with His justification within the believer.

This concept was changed by the writers of the Formula of Concord.<sup>10</sup> Mannermaa wrote:



In contrast to Luther, justification and the indwelling of God in the believer are conceptually separated from each other in the Formula of Concord. Justification is only the forgiveness of sins. The indwelling of God follows in a logical sense after justification. One must ask here whether what Luther considers damning for the believer to think is exactly what the Formula of Concord calls sound doctrine: in the locus of justification the divine person of Christ is separated from the person of the believer, because justification is only a forensic imputation and does not presuppose the divine presence of Christ in faith.<sup>11</sup>

There are those who object to Luther's understanding of transformational justification. One such objector wrote: "God's will for us is that we be 'fully transformed into him. . . .' Can that really be Luther's meaning? His words cannot be taken to mean quite what they say."<sup>12</sup> To this, Peura responded:

Clearly on the grounds of an exclusive forensic understanding of justification and a so-called relational ontology, this passage from Luther is either incomprehensible or reveals a pantheism. But we can discount the possibility of pantheism if we acknowledge the presupposition of Luther's understanding of transformation, *unio cum Christo*, where Luther's view of justification appears in its fullness.<sup>13</sup>

If the writers of the Formula of Concord had stayed with Luther's concept of both phases of justification—forensic and experiential, perhaps the Reformation would not have ground to a halt within 100 years. Ellen White observed that by the time of Wesley "the great doctrine of justification by faith, so clearly taught by Luther, had been almost wholly lost sight of; and the Romish principle of trusting to good works for salvation, had taken its place."<sup>14</sup>

Mrs. White wrote the above in 1888, the year God sent His message of justification by faith to our beloved Seventh-day Adventist Church, affirming that "it is the Third Angel's message in verity"<sup>15</sup> and that He "commanded it to be given to the world."<sup>16</sup>

The Lord in His great mercy sent a most precious message to His people through Elders Waggoner and Jones. This

message was to bring more prominently before the world the uplifted Saviour, the sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. It presented justification through faith in the Surety; it invited the people to receive the righteousness of Christ, which is made manifest in obedience to all the commandments of God. . . . This is the message that God commanded to be given to the world. It is the third angel's message, which is to be proclaimed with a loud voice, and attended with the outpouring of His Spirit in a large measure.<sup>17</sup>

In his book, *Christ and His Righteousness*, in a single paragraph, Waggoner brought eleven experiences together as one. These are "forgiveness of sins," "cleared from guilt," "is justified," "made righteous," "a radical change," "another person," "remission of sins," "putting on Christ," "the new birth," "a new creature" and "a new, or a clean heart."

The forgiveness of sins is a reality; it is something tangible, something that vitally affects the individual. It actually clears him from guilt, and if he is cleared from guilt, is justified, made righteous, he has certainly undergone a radical change. He is, indeed, another person, for he obtained this righteousness for the remission of sins, in Christ. It was obtained only by putting on Christ. But "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." 2 Cor. 5:17. And so the full and free forgiveness of sins carries with it that wonderful and miraculous change known as the new birth, for a man cannot become a new creature except by a new birth. This is the same as having a new, or a clean, heart (emphasis supplied).<sup>18</sup>

Now, in closing, God gives to us the great privilege of proclaiming justification in its fullness during the time of the pre-Advent investigative judgment—1844 was the beginning of this judgment. The message to prepare God's people, in this time of judgment, began in 1888 at Minneapolis. This was/is the "loud cry" of the third angel's message that will prepare us for the finishing of the judgment hour experience. This second phase of justification is to be a personal justification—by faith in Christ alone. It is nothing less than our oneness with Christ. Christ never imputes nor imparts justification apart from Himself. He is our justification.

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- 1 See "Is Justification Legal?" *New England Pastor*, September/October 2011: 8-9. Also available online at newenglandpastormagazine.blogspot.com.
- 2 Gal 5:5; 1 Cor 6:11; John 3:3; Col 1:27; Gal 3:27; Eph 3:17; 2 Pet 1:4; Heb 6:4.
- 3 P.H. Eveson, *The Great Exchange: Justification by Faith Alone in the Light of Recent Thought* (Leominster, UK: Day One Publications, 1996), 82.
- 4 Martin Luther, *Luther's works*, vol. 26 : *Lectures on Galatians, 1535, Chapters 1-4* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, Eds., Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999).
- 5 Alister McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, third edition, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1999), 121.
- 6 Ibid, 199.
- 7 Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, editors, *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 28.
- 8 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), #s 774, 1127, 1131.
- 9 Braaten and Jenson, 72, 73.
- 10 *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (T. G. Tappert, Ed., Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 548-549. Tappert quotes the Formula of Concord, paragraph 54, under the heading, "The Righteousness of Faith Before God."
- 11 Braaten and Jenson, 38-39.
- 12 Quoted in Braaten and Jenson, 61.
- 13 Ibid. (And further: just as some of Luther's detractors label his writings, regarding the union of Christ with the believer in experiential justification by faith, as pantheism, so, likewise, some of E. J. Waggoner's detractors attempt to saddle him with pantheism. And on the same "grounds." Those who accuse Luther of pantheism seem unable to comprehend what he wrote because of their understanding "of an exclusive forensic understanding of justification." So it is with regard to Waggoner).
- 14 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press*, 1950), 253.
- 15 White, *Review and Herald*, April 1, 1890.
- 16 Letter 57, 1895, to O.A. Olson, *The Ellen G. White Materials*, (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1987), 1336.
- 17 White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1962), 91-92.
- 18 Waggoner, E.J., *Christ and His Righteousness* (Oakland, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1890), 65.



## The Universe at Risk

by Shawn Brace

I am always intrigued by how much I learn about

God from my kids. I know that I am no exception. These discoveries are often the result of the little headaches, heartaches, and challenges that come along when one is a parent. Sometimes they are from a Bible story I might be explaining or reading to my son, Camden. In this case, I gained profound theological insight into the great controversy as I was reading the story of “Jabel the shepherd” from the *My Bible Friends* series.

The story is a retelling of Jesus’ “lost sheep” parable in Luke 15. It recounts the tender care the shepherd has for his sheep, the protection and guidance he gives them. I remember the version well, sitting on my father’s lap long ago, scanning the painted pictures and listening to the reassuring words of God’s love, care, and searching heart. But as I was going through the story with Camden during this particular occasion, I was startled by a clear inaccuracy in the rendition. According to the author, when “Jabel” (as the author names him) goes out to search for the one lost sheep, he leaves the 99 in the sheep pen. But this is not how Jesus tells the story. According to Jesus, the shepherd actually leaves the 99 “in the wilderness” and goes after the one lost sheep.

The reason this jumped out at me is because I have been perplexed by Jesus’ words for a long time. The Greek word for “wilderness” is *eremos* and it very clearly denotes a deserted place, unprotected against any or all that might wish to cause harm. It offers no safety while the shepherd attempts his rescue-saving mission and, presumably, if the shepherd never returns, the sheep will be left to fend for themselves, dangerously vulnerable and in jeopardy of themselves getting lost.

“Why,” I had always wondered, “would Jesus imply that He leaves the 99 in danger while attempting to find the one?” Of course, I fully recognize that not every parable—nor every word in those parables—is supposed to carry deep theological insight. But neither do I want to discount such anomalies out of hand, presuming that a story, text, or word was simply arbitrarily chosen by the author.

And that’s when it hit me (I guess all I needed was a little visual aid): The reason that Jesus says that the 99 are left in the wilderness is because these represent the unfallen beings in the universe that were endangered when Christ came on His earth-bound rescue mission. Think about it: If Jesus had failed in His rescue mission, what would have happened to the unfallen universe?

Thus, not only did God risk Himself in the plan of salvation, but the entire universe was placed at risk as well.

Though not addressing this idea in its fullness, Ellen White gives credence to some of these ideas in *Christ’s Object Lessons*. There she writes, “The rabbis understood Christ’s parable as applying to the publicans and sinners; but it has also a wider meaning. By the lost sheep Christ represents not only the individual sinner but the one world that has apostatized and has been ruined by sin. This world is but an atom in the vast dominions over which God presides, yet this little fallen world—the one lost sheep—is more precious in His sight than are the ninety and nine that went not astray from the fold. Christ, the loved Commander in the heavenly courts, stooped from His high estate, laid aside the glory that He had with the Father, in order to save the one lost world.”<sup>1</sup>

With this “wider meaning” in place and recognizing that the lost sheep represents the fallen world in a corporate sense, it stands to reason that the 99 do, in

fact, represent those—perhaps the other created worlds—who have never fallen. And, thus, we are able to see that we are “more precious” to God than the unfallen beings that reside in the vast reaches of the universe.

So what does all this mean? Is it simply a nice theological idea that has no relevance to our lives? Hardly. Recognizing the risk the whole universe was placed in gives me a deeper appreciation for how much God values me and the premium He places upon my redemption. It also helps me take my eyes off my own salvation and onto the broader issues that are taking place. Though God’s heart is all about me and my salvation, my heart shouldn’t be. I should have more sympathy for what God has been up to in this great controversy, and more sympathy for the unfallen universe that has been placed at risk—and been forced to wait a long time—for God’s plan of salvation to draw to its exciting zenith. Thus, I can respond to God’s grace not only for His sake, but the entire universe’s as well. After all, as Paul declares in Romans, “For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God” (Romans 8:19, NKJV).

**Shawn Brace** pastors the Bangor and Dexter churches in Maine. He and his wife, Camille, have a handsome son, Camden, and a beautiful daughter, Acadia. He is the author of two books, including the recently released *Pursued*, published by Pacific Press. When Shawn isn’t busy pastoring, he loves spending time outdoors—especially photographing the beauty of New England.

1 Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1941), 190-191.

A vintage-style lantern with a dark metal frame and a glass-paned body, mounted on a white, textured post. The lantern is positioned on the right side of the image. The background is a soft-focus winter scene with a snow-covered ground and a line of bare trees in the distance.

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